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UNCLAS BOGOTA 010890

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DIAGNOSTIC RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL STOLEN FROM
ECOPEPETROL

1. Summary. Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol confirmed that a small container of diagnostic radioactive material was stolen from one of its facilities in early October. The material is used to measure flow rates through its oil pipelines and contains a very low concentration of Cesium-137 that does not pose a WMD threat. End summary.

2. In late October, contacts at Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol confirmed that a lead container holding radioactive material was stolen from Ayacucho Station in La Gloria, Cesar Department earlier that month. The container (approximately the size of a one-gallon paint can) holds a mixture that includes Cesium-137 (plutonium is not/not an ingredient). Ecopetrol uses the material to measure the density of the products that are transported through its pipelines. Ecopetrol officials stated that the concentration of radioactive material was very low and that it was very unlikely the container's contents could be used in the creation of a "dirty bomb".

3. Ecopetrol officials presume that the container was stolen for the lead casing and used for scrap since this has occurred on limited occasions in the past. As soon as Ecopetrol discovered the theft, it sent word to scrap metal traders to warn them of the health hazards of opening the container. Ecopetrol also issued a press release warning the public of the severe health hazards; the press release led to a media announcement in national newspaper El Tiempo on October 23. Colombian police are still working to locate the container.
DRUCKER